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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the computerization of the libraries in the Chinese International School in Hong Kong. The Infant, Junior and Secondary libraries, with a staff of three professional librarians, one library assistant, and one audiovisual technician, needed an automated system which could support their bilingual curriculum. Two computer systems were evaluated which could input both Chinese and English language materials, and the V-LIB system was selected. This system consisted of six modules: (1) cataloguing and enquiry; (2) serials; (3) acquisitions; (4) item control; (5) loans and circulation; and (6) MARC interface. Three other options were an online public access catalog (OPAC); ideographic capability that allows handling of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Portuguese scripts; and an image interface. Special features of V-LIB include customization; user friendliness; security; local support; training; enhancements; and CJK capability--the ability to input and display Chinese, Japanese, and Korean characters. In the Secondary school, implementation of the cataloging module for both English and Chinese language materials took six months, and adding the OPAC and circulation modules required the rest of the year. Computerization of the Infant and Junior libraries will follow. (SWC)

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Computerizing the Chinese International School Libraries

by
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The School

The Chinese International School is unique in Hong Kong. It aims to teach the students both English and Mandarin so that the students will be truly bilingual. There are approximately one thousand students from Reception to Year 13 (ages 4 to about 18). The students have a heavy program of learning English and Chinese languages throughout as well as the standard subjects taught in most Western countries.

Mandarin is the official language of China, Taiwan, and Singapore, and since Hong Kong will be returned to China in 1997 there is a great deal of interest in the study of Mandarin. In fact, Cantonese is the most common Chinese language in Hong Kong since the province of Canton is right next door to Hong Kong, and the most Hong Kong chinese come from Canton (or Guangzhou as it is now more commonly known). The local schools teach Cantonese and English. There are also a number of international schools that offer the UK curriculum mostly to students who will be returning to UK or Hong Kong students opting for a British education. It is also possible to have a Hong Kong version of an American education or even French or German. At all other schools in Hong Kong one language predominates. Students can opt to study other languages, but this is not usually compulsory. At the chinese International School all students must study English and Mandarin. Therefore, to support this mission our libraries are also bilingual. We collect English language and Chinese language materials.

The Libraries

We have three divisions in the school - Infant (Reception-P2), Junior (P3-P6), and Secondary (Year 7-Year 13). We have three libraries to serve these divisions of almost one thousand square meters. There are five floors of library. The Infant and Junior Libraries are one floor each in a block adjacent to the Infant and Junior Divisions and the Secondary Library consists of three floors likewise adjacent to the Secondary Division. The school is ten years old. It has been growing year by year so that in September 1993 we have our first Year 13. The libraries have been growing also.

However it is only since we have moved into our new facilities two years ago that we have had full-time staff in the Junior and Secondary Libraries. We now have five staff members - three professional librarians, one library assistant and one audiovisual technician.

When we moved into the present facilities two years ago the collections in the Junior and Secondary Libraries were quite small. The Secondary Library had only about one thousand items. It was felt to be a perfect time to computerize, anticipating very rapid growth. In fact during the last two years we have added about six thousand items to the Secondary Library alone.

The System

When we went shopping for a computer system for our libraries we needed to find one that would allow us to input both our Chinese-language and English-language materials together and display them together for our students and staff to support our bilingual curriculum. We found only two: Dynix and V-LIB. Since Dynix quoted us HK$1 million for software alone, this reduced the field to one. In fact after attending demonstrations of both, V-LIB was the one that appealed to us the most.

V-LIB was developed by a Singaporean-based company and I'm told that the program was written by a librarian. I think that it shows after looking at other library systems written by people with almost no knowledge or understanding of libraries. V-LIB is PC based library management system which uses a standard DOS environment. It consists of six different modules: Cataloguing and Enquiry, Serials, Acquisitions, Item Control, Loans and Circulation, and MARC interface. There are also three other options: OPAC (On-line Public Access Catalog), ideographic capability that allows handling of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Portuguese scripts and image interface. All modules are fully integrated so that a record input or modified in one module is immediately

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available in all others.

The system can be introduced gradually depending on budgetary constraints. In our case we began computerizing with the Cataloging and Enquiry module and introduced the Circulation and OPAC modules at a later stage. We have plans to add the Serials and Acquisitions modules in the future.

Let me give a brief description of the modules that we are presently using.

Cataloging and Enquiry

- Catalog records are in LC MARC format using standard MARC tags. During the set-up phase the library defines which it will use. This allows the possibility of importing MARC records at a later stage.
- Different information types such as books, serials, videos, posters, etc. can be entered.
- Multiple copies of an item can be attached to a single catalog record, each identified and tracked by its unique barcode number.
- Data is entered interactively so that it is immediately available for modification or enquiry. All indexes are updated online.
- A stopword list is maintained to eliminate unnecessary indexing of common words such as "a" and "the".
- Presearching by keyword in title, author, subject, series, or call number are available to check for duplicates.
- Reports available in this module include accession lists and catalog lists sorted by any order nominated and the contents of the list can be defined by the library.

Loans and Circulation

- Borrower records are maintained and can be updated online including borrower status, reservations, loans, overdue items, fines, and even mess-ages.
- Loan periods, fine rates according to borrower type, and information type can be predefined for loans.
- Due dates are generated by a pre-set calendar to allow for weekends and public and school holidays.
- When returning, reservations and overdues are notified. Renewals can easily be done. Fines are also calculated and can be discharged at this point.
- All the parameters are pre-set in the setup phase but can easily be overridden.
- A variety of reports are available including loan and circulation log reports, overdue notices, reservation notices, lists of items on loan, and circulation statistics.

OPAC

- It is possible to limit a search according to information type, e.g. only Chinese language books or audiovisual material.
- Searches can be made by author, subject or series or according to keywords in the title entry.
- Boolean searching to expand or limit the search is also available.
- Users can find out if the item is on loan or on the shelf and reservations can be made at the OPAC workstations.
- Users can check their library records.

Special Features of V-LIB

Customization

The system can be set up to suit the needs of the library. For example, catalog records can be as detailed or as simple as required.

User Friendliness

All modules are menu or function-key driven with help screens for all functions. The use of color in the OPAC workstations also increases the system's appeal to students.

Security

After horror stories of student hackers disabling the library system in another local school, we were very conscious of security. Various levels of security are available so that students can only have access to the OPAC module. Using ID and passwords, only the library staff can access the cataloging and circulation modules.

Local Support

Vitechnology has an office in Hong Kong. They are available to help us at any time. They have been known to actually be with us within the hour! For example, on one occasion the system was shut down without switching off one of the workstations before the server which meant that we lost all of our records. Fortunately we had been doing our backup daily and with some help we were up and running again in a very short time.

Training

Training was provided for each module as it was introduced. This was vital as there was very little previous experience with computers among the library staff.

Enhancements

Any enhancements or developments to the program are passed on to the other users automatically. The system is constantly being upgraded and improved. For example, "see" and "see also" references have just been introduced.

CJK Capability

Finally, the most exciting feature: Chinese, Japanese, and Korean characters can be input and displayed in this system. This feature was vital for us since a large part of our collection is Chinese language material.

Implementation

Computerizing began in the Secondary Library and was completed in three phases. During Phase 1, all of the records were entered in the Cataloging Module including both English-language and Chinese-language materials. This took about six months alongside the normal operation of the library. The OPAC module was then introduced in Phase 2 and finally the Circulation module in Phase 3. The whole process took about one year. The Infant and Junior Libraries will follow this schedule. So far, they have entered all of the records in the Cataloging Module and are about to introduce the OPAC modules.

The Future

We look forward to introducing the Acquisitions and Serials modules after a breathing space, possibly in a year's time. In the meantime, we are enjoying discovering all of the capabilities of our system. The software developer is very responsive to our suggestions and enhancements, and in turn we are benefiting from developments passed on to us from the suggestions made by other libraries using this system.

We are particularly pleased that we were able to introduce a computer system to our libraries when our collection was so small and the libraries very new.